

# critical digest



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## This Week in NYC

The Phoenix Theatre was picked by the NY State Council of the Arts to participate in the first year's program to stimulate cultural activity throughout the state. A repertory tour of the current hit Hamlet and a new production of Androcles and the Lion will be presented Oct 2-Nov 18 in upstate cities, with ticket prices \$3 and \$4. The Arts Council will underwrite the losses- if any- up to \$80,000. Ballet, opera, music groups will also tour upstate cities. Total sum granted is \$450,000 for the first year's program.

## Plays

Billy Barnes People West Coast revue to open Jun 13 at Royale, presented by John Pool- Joe Landis. Joyce Jameson, Patti Regan, Ken Berry, Jackie Joseph of 1959 "Billy Barnes Revue" are featured... The Nose of Jerry Pepper new comedy by Arnold Shulman cancelled for next season by Roger Stevens due to booking problems... Isle of Children new play by Robert Joseph to star Patty Duke, staged by Jules Dassin due in Jan... Brecht's Arturi Ui adapted by George Tab-ori may be presented next season by David Merrick. Puntila adapted by Gerhard Neilhaus to be presented by John Eyre.

## Players

Karen Lee, 10 year old stand-by for Patty Duke, replaced latter in The Miracle Worker... George Marcy subbing for ill James Mitchell, Carnival... Salem Ludwig replaced Mike Kellin, Rhinoceros... Lenka Peterson moved up from smaller role to replace Colleen Dewhurst, All The Way Home... Kevin McCarthy to switch roles in Advise and Consent May 22 when Richard Kiley leaves to make film... Rudy Vallee and Robert Morse to co-star in How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying musical Oct 14.

## NYC Calendar

Many Loves- Living Theatre (530-6th Av) 5/15. William Carlos Williams drama returned to repertory. Postponed from 5/10.

Mandingo-Lyceum 5/17. Billy Baxter-Edward Friedland present new play by Jack Kirkland, based on novel by Kyle Onstott, directed by Louis Macmillian with Franchot Tone, Brooke Hayward, Rockne Tarkington

Porgy and Bess- City Center- 5/17. NY City Light Opera Co presents two week revival, directed by William Ball with William Warfield, Leese Foster, Rawn Spearman.

Donnybrook! - 46th St 5/18. Fred Hebert-David Kapp present a new musical based on "The Quiet Man" novel and film by Maurice Walsh. Book by Robert McEnroe, music and lyrics by Johnny Burke, directed by Jack Cole with Eddie Foy, Jr, Susan Johnson, Art Lund.

## Broadway Business

Variety reports grosses dropped on most, though All the Way Home jumped after awards. Sellouts at Camelot, Carnival, and Mary, Mary.

## Drama Desk

7th annual "Drama Desk-Vernon Rice Awards" for "Out-standing achievement in the Off Broadway theatre" presented to Theatre 1961, The Premise, The Fantasticks, Boris Tumarin, the director of "The Idiot" and "Montserrat" and Joan Hackett, Call Me By My Rightful Name.

Emory Lewis, Cue, and Stuart Little, Herald Tribune, re-elected president and vice-president of "Drama Desk"... Kenneth Tynan, London Observer, to return to "New Yorker" next season... Robert Wood named editor of "Show", Frank Gibney editor of "Show Business Illustrated."

## Off Broadway

Shows that closed include --- The Tattooed Countess after 5 performances, Smiling the Boy Fell Dead after 22, twin bill of Krapp's Last Tape and The Zoo Story after 573... Call Me By My Rightful Name extended its run an extra week and closed after 119 performances... Twin bill of American Dream and The Death of Bessie Smith to move from York to Cherry Lane May 25... The Premise still unable to use its 154 Bleecker St location continues a third week at Village Gate, 185 Thompson St, after massive license confusion... And The Child Is a Woman drama by Paul Claudel, adapted from French by Howard Hart to be presented Jun 1 at Theatre Marquee, directed by Paul Davis, with Tani Seitz, Michael Wager... Diakos by modern Greek playwright Soteris Patatzis to be presented by Lemos Theatrical Company of Athens Jun 2-4 at Fashion Inst Playhouse, W 27, simultaneous translation by transistor radios to be available.

## Children's Theatre

Young Abe Lincoln moved back to York from O'Neill after 27 performances. It will alternate matinee performances at York with school dates in the NY area.

## Theatre TV Notes

Julie Harris, Martin Gabel, Keenan Wynn join Laurence Olivier in David Susskind's production of The Power and the Glory being taped this week for fall TV presentation.

## Play Diary

Next Week: A Call on Kuprin Broadhurst 5/25.

Following Week:- Pal Joey- City Center 5/31... Diakos- Fashion Inst- 6/2.

The Blacks- St Marks Playhouse (133-2nd Av) 5/4/61. 4 pro- Times, Post, Journal American, World Telegram & Sun- and 3 con- Herald Tribune, News, Mirror- filed on new play by Jean Genet, translated by Bernard Frechtman, staged by Gene Frankel, produced by Sidney Bernstein-George Edgar-Andre Gregory with an all Negro cast headed by Roscoe Lee Browne, James Earl Jones, Cynthia Belgrave, Ethel Ayler, with movement staged by Talley Beatty. Three of the four affirmatives were raves for exciting, brilliant play and production. Two of the three negatives were filed mostly on dull second act debate. Pro side headed by Taubman, Times, who cheered original and stimulating evening, with both writing and performance a brilliant sardonic and lyrical tone poem for the theatre. Watts, Post, raved about fascinating and disturbing dramatic experience, Genet's enigmatic contemplation of race hatred given a stunning production, less a plan than a kind of snarling ritual. McClain, Journal American, lauded the most exciting and magic mood created on any small stage this season, an atmosphere of words and ritual that often overwhelms the audience done by an all Negro cast that is consistently first class. In a milder tone of approval Aston, WTS, admitted he was fascinated by the technic and the completely engrossing performances, though he was never touched emotionally. Negative side headed by Kerr, Herald Tribune, found it interesting in what it attempts and temporarily achieves in the first act, but felt its show of candor is at the last evasive and as drama it is incomplete. Kerr thought certain of the director's dionysiac effects altogether hypnotic. Davis, News, panned it as overwritten and overplayed almost to the state of incoherency. Stern, Mirror, rated top spot to Charles Gross' musical background and the opportunity it gave the Negro cast to perform with distinction. Mirror aisle-sitter did find first act bitter and ruthless though sometimes heavy handed, but feared play fell into trap of idea plays in second act and debated old arguments instead of probing people.

Becket-Hudson 5/8/61. 7 pro- unanimous- filed on three week return of new play by Jean Anouilh, translated by Lucienne Hill, staged by Peter Glenville, presented by David Merrick with Laurence Olivier switching from title role to Henry II, and Arthur Kennedy playing the title role. Aisle-sitters split on their views if they liked first presentation better, if they liked Olivier better than Anthony Quinn as Henry, and if they liked Arthur Kennedy's portrayal in the title role better than Olivier's. Funke, Times, raved on Olivier's virtuoso performance, an unforgettable experience, though he thought Kennedy was overshadowed. Crist, Herald Tribune, rated it one of Olivier's most brilliant performances which gives the play clarity and vigor that reveals its riches. Her suggestion was that Olivier should have played against Olivier to best reveal the Becket character. Chapman, News, agreed Olivier gave a brilliant performance, but felt it did throw the play out of gear, though still a stunning production. Coleman, Mirror, cheered both Olivier and Kennedy. Watts, Post, thought new version seemed more moving and exciting with Olivier brilliant and Kennedy admirable. McClain, Journal American, did not think drama improved by the switch in cast, though the play is still toweringly brilliant. Aston, World Telegram & Sun, cheered Olivier and praised Kennedy for doing the best he can against such brilliant competition. Oct 5 presentation at St James drew 6 pros and 1 con (Taubman, Times.).

Meet Peter Grant- Folksbiene (175 E. Broadway) 5/10/61. 3 pro- Times, News, World Telegram & Sun- and 4 con- Herald Tribune, Mirror, Post, Journal American- filed on new musical based on Ibsen's "Peer Gynt" with music by Ted Harris, book and lyrics by Elliott Arluck, directed by Roger Sullivan with Chet Sommers, Paula Coonen, presented by Lee Bergman. Affirmative generally liked music, cast and production more than book, while the negative majority panned book and split on talent views. Most singled out Chet Sommers in title role as a handsome new leading man with a fine voice. Calta, Times, recommended venture worth seeing, a modest modernization of the tale faithful to the original with inventive book and lyrics, a bouncy and spirited score and several sweet and melancholy songs rendered expertly by young troupe. Davis, News, felt songs, dances were far superior to the story, and he praised Mary Ann Reed's costumes and John Braden's sets as superior. Aston, WTS, found the result entertaining by a composer who knows his business, a dance and acting cast expert at their trade and a book that loses its sense of direction. Negative voter Morgenstern, Herald Tribune, did okay the frequently interesting music well sung by a relentlessly energetic cast, but vetoed the baffling book. Coleman, Mirror, panned tedious, pretentious show with several excellent singers. Watts, Post, settled for terrible as the word to sum up the evening presented by a blameless cast. To Post man it seemed like something whipped up by an amateur theatrical group for the edification of doting relatives and fiercely loyal friends. McClain, Journal American, also condemned it as neither inventive, tuneful nor well performed.

A Curious Evening With Gypsy Rose Lee - Mayfair (235 W 46) 5/9/61. 4 pro- Mirror, Post, Journal American and World Telegram & Sun- and 3 con- Times, Herald Tribune, News- filed on Gypsy Rose Lee's "autobiographical house party" featuring Lee as narrator of film clips on her life. To a man the reviewers praised talent of star, but they differed on the entertainment she provided, and on the quality of the home-movie she assembled. McEvoy, Mirror, marked it a very entertaining evening, not great theatre, but lots of fun. Herridge, Post, enjoyed the cleverly put together film presented by one of the friendliest and merriest hostesses in show business. McClain, Journal American, recommended it as a pleasantly nostalgic experience with spicy comments on a well edited screening. Aston, WTS, reprinted his Nov review when program was presented for several Mon evenings at Cherry Lane, a program done with Lee's own style and manner. Dissenter Esterow, Times, admitted it was never dull, but feared that two hours of home movies are not always exciting. Davis, News, marked it a very special type of parlor movies. Morgenstern, Herald Tribune, noted quality of films may suffer from the quality of the projection equipment, but added that Lee's geniality almost succeeds in shining up the film's many dull patches. Critic advised theatre-goers to watch Lee instead of the film, her lovely face is radiant even when the movies get tedious.

The Browning Version & Red Peppers- Equity Library 5/9/61. Aston, World Telegram & Sun, praised final ELT production of season and final one at Lenox Hill Playhouse as professional, believable and touching.



GREEN  
ROOM  
DEPARTMENT



PROS & CONS BY TMK

**TIX & TAX...** If Broadway is indeed in a last ditch fight for survival, Herald Tribune editorial wonders how 5% rebate of NYC admission tax to pay union pensions will save the day. Paper nevertheless urges repeal of both the 5% NYC and 10% federal admission taxes. ...5% reduction in theatre ticket prices should go along with any repeal of the tax, suggests Chapman, News. Critic points out that the high percentage of failures detailed in Dr. Saxon's survey is due to incompetent playwrights, bum actors and knucklehead producers; and taking the tax off won't help a bit.

**COLUMN TIPS...** Judy Garland may star in new musical version of "Funny Face" by Lerner-Rodgers, hears Kilgallen, Journal American. ... Laurence Olivier is trying to postpone film chores so he can continue in Becket, notes Wilson, Post.

**CRITIC AT WORK...** It isn't altogether the fault of the reviewers that they do not write with enough enthusiasm in their favorable reviews, points out Watts, Post. The trouble is that adjectives are getting out of hand. People in show business use "great" so prodigally, for instance, that calling something good or fine is seen as virtually a knock.

**TWOFER VIEWS...** Cut rate and twofer tickets are good for the Fabulous Invalid because they encourage the family and student trade, approves Coleman, Mirror. ... Fiorello! ticket price cut heralded as the start of a small economic revolution against twofers by Chapman, News. ... NY Ticket Brokers Assn display ad also lauded producers of Fiorello! for making show available to all at lower prices, not just those with special discount cards. ... Arguments against high ticket prices seem useless to Sobol, Journal American, for each new hit proves again people will pay top prices to see the top shows.

**CRITICAL THOUGHTS...** Broadway producers have certain qualities in common, surmises McClain, Journal American. They are dedicated theatre people, they like money, and the most successful are superb salesmen. ... Big Fish, Little Fish picked as best comedy of the season by Chapman, News. ... A Far Country is a skillfully wrought play of ideas that dramatizes an episode in the study of mental diseases, a kind of intellectual detective story, recommends Lerner, Post.

**OUTER HOPES...** Genuine freshness, vigor and originality in the theatre are going to have to come from the out of town theatres, forsoes Crosby, Herald Tribune. Far from the rapacity of Broadway unions these little theatres could put on new plays for next to nothing. They could nurture young playwrights like Joan Littlewood's "Theatre Workshop" has done for Brendan Behan and Shelagh Delaney. Columnist also urged passage of Sen Javits (R-NY) US Arts Foundation Bill which would canalize and encourage the living theatre in all its forms. ... Only if a powerful foundation of the Federal government underwrote a long range program can the vicious circle of providing adequate audiences for professional touring companies be solved, believes Taubman, Times, after visiting with Cleveland Playhouse Repertory Company at two Florida stops.

The Blacks is first and foremost an exciting visual ballet that is somewhat less effective as drama. The fascinating movement throughout by the graceful, talented Negro cast is much more effective in transmitting the mood than the verbal production itself. A major reason seems to be the continued reminders that what is taking place is merely a play presented by polite actors. Neither the cast nor the audience is allowed to forget this for a moment. Taken at face value Genet's attempt to terrify, frighten and lecture the white audience is not successful. But thanks to the inspired dance movement and overall direction the result is a remarkably moving, stimulating experience.

Becket is still a beautiful dramatic spectacle in the classical style, now with an added magnificent performance by Laurence Olivier as Henry II. Comparing the current production with the original earlier this season, one must judge that the former was a more complete, satisfying version. The battle between the two leading characters was spelled as clearly as the author would permit. In the current production Olivier gives a truly spectacular performance that nears the point of over-acting, but that always stays within bounds. Arthur Kennedy in the title role has the thankless task of literally trying to act with him on the same stage and fails. Further many of the humorous moments have been expanded close to farce, and a toning down of these segments would be helpful.

A Curious Evening Wity Gypsy Rose Lee is really a delightful evening with a charming hostess who makes everyone at home and then makes them enjoy two hours of some very badly edited home movies about a fascinating theatre personality. Grace, beauty, good taste and humor of the actress-writer-strip teaser is no secret and all the ingredients are displayed, plus her wise business sense. In spite of the historic interest in many of the film clips, the evening probably would have been more fun and less curious if the lady had talked and sung her way through it.

While Broadway may or may not survive the season after next, have no fears for 1961-62. Several plays already have \$1 and \$2 million in theatre parties booked, and at least one producer postponed a production because he could not book a large theatre for the season.

The NY State Council of the Arts is off to a good start as far as the drama is concerned. First they had the good critical sense to pick the experienced Phoenix Theatre cast and staff. Second they have agreed to underwrite the losses, if any, not give an outright grant. Third they will present the drama tour at rates one half the ticket prices of most touring companies. Finally the entire project was approved and put in motion without a single cry of censorship from a publicity hungry politician.





OUTER  
BROADWAY  
THEATRE  
LETTER

College Theatre

Edward Albee will conduct the Drama Workshop at Wagner College, Staten Island, NY, Summer Writers Conference Jul 11-21. Enrollment limited to 15.

Richard Southern, British open stage designer and theatre historian, appointed Andrew Mellon Visiting Professor of Drama for May at Carn Inst of Tech, Pittsburgh. He will give six public lectures.

Peg 'O My Heart and The Old Soak to be presented Jun 8-30 by Majestic Showboat at towns in Indiana, Ohio, Illinois. Cast and staff will earn credit at drama department of Indiana Univ, Bloomington... Plato's Symposium staged by Queen's Revels, Columbia University, at Hunter College, NYC, Playhouse.

AETA- ANTA

Frances Heflin to be ANTA Guest Star Jul 5 in Dark at the Top of the Stairs at State Univ of Education, Brockport, NY... Walter Abel to be ANTA Guest Star Jul 10-22 at Eastern New Mexico Univ, Portales.

Arthur Miller, Tyrone Guthrie, Abraham Ribicoff among the speakers at AETA NYC convention Aug 28-30.

Shakespeare

National Shakespeare Festival Old Globe Theatre, San Diego, Calif opens 12th season Jun 27-Sept 12. William Ball will direct Twelfth Night and Allen Fletcher will direct Richard III and Merchant of Venice.

Will Geer and Patrick Hines return to American Shakespeare Festival, Stratford, Conn to appear in all three productions. Hines will also be assistant to director Jack Landau on Macbeth and Troilus and Cressida, Carla Huston, The Fantasticks, to take a leave of absence of musical to appear at Stratford, Conn as one of the three witches in Macbeth and Phebe in As You Like It.

Summer Playhouses

Candlelight Cafe-Theatre to debut in Summit, Ill in June with The Moon is Blue, presented by William Pullinsi... Monmouth, NJ, Civic Auditorium, which offered free use of the 350 seat theatre at a shopping center, will present Dona Davis' productions of The Tunnel of Love and The Glass Menagerie in Jul.

San Juan, PR, Theatre Festival to present Carousel, Guys and Dolls, Oklahoma and West Side Story for one week each in Jul at San Juan Univ... The Boy Friend directed by Robert Faine Grose will open May 30 at Fred Miller Theatre, Milwaukee, and will try for a full summer's run.

Melody Fair, North Tarrytown, NY to open Jun 6 with Desires Rides Again... Playhouse in the Park, Philadelphia to open May 26 with Carol Channing's Show Girl... Allen Jenkins to star May 23-Jun 24 in Lullaby, Cirque Theatre Seattle... The Balcony to be presented Jun 8 at Civic Playhouse, Hollywood by Robert Ellis Miller.

Add Summer Packages--- Steve Allen and Jayne Meadows in The Fourposter... Craig Stevens and Alexis Smith in Under the Yum Yum Tree.

London

Becket with Eric Porter and Christopher Plummer opens Jul 11 at Aldwych, directed by Peter Hall... Sean O'Casey's The Bishop's Bonfire due Jul 26 at Mermaid... Thurber Carnival delayed due to casting problems, so James Thurber to return to NY

Paris

The Tenth Man translated by Jose Andre Lacour, directed by Raymond Gerome opened at Theatre Gymnase.

Europe

Thornton Wilder commissioned to write a play for the Sept 1963 opening of the Frankfurt, Germany, Municipal Theatre.

Spring Repertory

Alley Theatre, Houston, Texas permanent repertory company serves the theatre with vigor and imagination, praises Taubman, Times, after viewing current productions of Six Characters in Search of an Author and a bill of Chekhov, O'Neill and O'Casey plays presented as Friends and Lovers. The former was played in a high comic style that did not neglect the play's burden of questioning and pathos, and the latter was put on with broad dramatic and comic brush strokes. Visiting reviewer urged local playgoers to discover the theatre in their midst and to back it with patronage and money. The Alley Theatre, he concluded, is a useful, dedicated cultural institution made in Texas, and Texans should help it to become even better.

Drama Desk

"Outer Circle" organizations of writers covering NY theatre for out of town papers, presented 11th annual awards to Rhinoceros, Gower Champion for staging Carnival, Big Fish, Little Fish, American Shakespeare Festival, and Rosemary Murphy of Period of Adjustment.

Australia

Old Vic tour opens Jul 12 in Melbourne with Vivien Leigh, John Merivale presenting in repertory --- Duel of Angels, Twelfth Night, and The Lady of the Camellias by Marguerite Gautier, all directed by Robert Helpmann.

Tryout Calendar

A Call on Kuprin-Forrest  
Philadelphia 5/8

Current Road Tours

Fiorello- Denver 5/15.

Flower Drum Song- Cincinnati 5/15



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